

THE D-EVOLUTION - BOOK ONE

# DECEIT



SAMPLE

SEAN ALLEN

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## Chapter 1: Dark Stranger

“Waiting like death,” Malo whispered.

Talfus glanced at his partner.

He wasn't much for talk. None of his kind were. But Malo never wasted a word, and Talfus preferred it that way. There were too many stories these days. Too much lying and bragging—too much bullshit. *But I guess that's what happens when the truth is more terrible than anything else.* Still, Talfus appreciated Malo's straightforward way.

Most folks thought Moxen were simple in the head. But the miners were stronger than most, with resolve like forged metal and a fierce loyalty to friends and kin alike. He stood alongside Talfus, some yards from the cliff's edge, scanning the horizon, dark eyes flitting back and forth, peering through dark clouds overhead. His battle hammer sat on the ground beside him, tipped on its bludgeon, and the Moxen gripped the handle, thick fist clenching the hide-bound loop at its end. Talfus stared at Malo from horn tips to hooves, then smiled and shook his head. Calling the Moxen big didn't do him justice. *Giant* was much closer to the mark.

The crown of his head was eight feet high and some inches, the horns curling from either side adding two more feet at least. Tan fur covered his muscled frame, all of it short, save for the dark whiskers tracing his jaw. His beard danced, fluttering on the wind as the gathering storm raised its voice, and Talfus smirked. More often than not, that kind of thing would've made the Moxen chuckle. But not today. Today he stood like a stone—eyes, beard, and clenching fist the only signs Malo was a living thing.

Talfus never liked to see his friend worry. But he understood. The curve on his mouth faded, and he turned his gaze back to the sky. The two of them had scouted point for more

rendezvous than Talfus could count. But this time they weren't looking for the usual delivery. *This isn't a transport hauling food, weapons, or med-kits. This might be the only thing that can save us all from ruin.*

"Waiting like death," Malo whispered again.

"Patience, my friend," said Talfus. "He'll be here."

"How you know?" Malo said, glancing down. "Waadi wisdom?"

Talfus shook his head, the smirk playing at his lips again. "No," he said. "The Waadi aren't any wiser than the Moxen. But I do know a bit about the Mewlatai."

"What about them?" said Malo.

"The Serum maker swore he'd be here. And the Mewlatai would die on their own swords before they betrayed their code." *As long as he's an honorable mew. Gods of the Brine, please let him be honorable.*

Malo wrinkled his brow and looked skyward again.

Lightning crackled through the clouds and Talfus grimaced, the electric heat stinging on his face. The storms on Sitiri-9 were the worst kind for a creature born of Mother Sea. All wind and lightning, and hardly a lick of wet. He touched the scales on his arm, and his scowl deepened. It'd been too long since he'd had a good soaking, and it showed, a film of gray dulling the once-blue shine of his scales. "I wish it would rain just once on this forsaken rock!" he said, lifting his hand.

Malo chuckled, a deep rumble from his gut.

"What's so funny?" said Talfus.

"Fish man out of water. Very funny!"

Talfus smiled, and what started as a chuckle between friends burst into laughter. It was a dangerous risk to take. Talfus knew it, and Malo did too, he was sure. A Durax scout looking for Dissenters could've heard them from the valley below. Hell, a half-dead goat could've heard them from the next gorge over. But their mission was dire, and the light air welcome. They tried to hold back, hands clamping their mouths, spluttering and snorting. But it was no use. Talfus and Malo laughed, bellies and shoulders bouncing, both of them pawing tears from their eyes.

They made an odd pair, to say the least. Under any other circumstances, Talfus wouldn't have known the Moxen existed. And, truth be told, he wouldn't have cared much if he'd found out they had—just another race of people in a galaxy full of countless others. But that was one good thing about the Duraxian War. Perhaps the *only* good thing. Talfus had found a brother he'd never known he had.

“Think about family today?” Malo said.

It was one of his favorite questions. But no matter how many times he asked, it never failed to hitch the breath in Talfus's chest. When they'd first met, Talfus was hell-set on forgetting his blood and the terrible things that had happened to them. But Malo started each day remembering his kin, drawing strength from their time together. And soon Talfus was doing the same. “Of course,” he said, tears stinging his eyes. “No more thoughts about forgetting. I know now that would be torment worse than facing all the Durax alone. Thanks to you.” He smiled up at Malo, and the Moxen smiled back.

A red glow shone in the corner of his sight, and Talfus eyed the transponder strapped to his rifle. The light pulsed quicker, and he took the gun in both hands as Malo hefted up his hammer. A faint growl cut the wind, its rumble swelling as the beacon beat faster. The lens flared solid crimson, and the underbelly of a Zebulon star freighter slipped through the clouds up ahead.

It was a beautiful machine, dark and smooth, its rounded nose flowing to its swept-back wings, its wings curving softly back to its fuselage. A low cockpit sat near the front, its small windows almost invisible. If the ship had landing lights, Talfus couldn't tell where they should be on the seamless body, and its black finish failed to catch even a glint of lightning arcing the sky. It was a ghost ship, built to disappear among the stars and outrun anyone who might stumble across its path. A ship, Talfus thought, quite befitting the legend of the Mewlatai.

Four doors snapped wide on the underside of the freighter, and Talfus leveled his rifle. The craft hung there for a moment, engines churning against the storm, then landing skids drifted through the breaches. They weren't automatics or cannons, but Talfus kept his gun pressed tight to his shoulder, trigger finger at the ready.

"Why not land?" grunted Malo. Talfus couldn't see him, but he knew Malo was in position. He'd be standing a stride left and back from Talfus, clear of the Waadi's line of fire, ready to set loose his hammer should any foot soldiers arrive.

"I'd guess he's scanning the area for signs of an ambush," said Talfus.

"Good idea. Why not us do?"

"A scan could be traced from orbit without a signal shield," Talfus said. "The ship's hull protects its transmissions. But we've got the next best thing. I posted lookouts on the north and south ridges of the plateau. If they see anything that looks like a Durax raid, they'll signal us to abort."

"What sign Malo look for?"

Talfus eased his gun barrel down and turned. "If this light on my gun flashes green, I want you to stop what you're doing and run. I want you to run back into the mine, and use the tunnels

to lose anyone chasing you.” He glanced at the crooked cavern yawning behind them. “Do you understand?”

The Moxen shook his head. “Malo not leave without Talfus.”

“Malo, I’m giving you an order,” Talfus said. “I’m a captain and *you* are a lieutenant. You’re supposed to follow my instructions.”

“Malo die by fish man’s side. Won’t leave friend.”

Talfus knew what was coming. They’d been through this before. But he’d never once stopped Malo from singing. And, if he was honest, he never would. Song, as the Moxen called it, was how they talked with one another. They made notes and harmonies to shame even the grandest singers in the days before the Durax. That alone would’ve been enough to let Malo go on. But Moxen song also affected the heart. Talfus had lost count of how many times Malo had sung him courage, stoking his fight as Durax and Berzerkers bore down on them. The Moxen had sung him peace too, when visions of his family torn to bits had haunted his dreams.

The first note drifted from Malo’s lips, and Talfus smiled. He knew it was coming, but the Waadi never tired of this song. Malo called it “The Song of Brothers,” and that was what Talfus felt in his heart—brotherhood. His bond to the Moxen burned brightly in his chest, then drifted farther, across the heavens, its warmth shining on the waters of Mother Sea, where his own brothers swam in her eternal arms. It was only a handful of notes. But Talfus always felt like time stood still when the Moxen sang.

Malo ended his ballad and smiled. “Malo have heart and strength to carry Talfus,” he said. “Won’t leave fish man behind.”

Talfus couldn’t argue with the Moxen. At least, not in earnest. He felt the same way. The moment the Dissension had paired them up, he knew the strongest Waadi couldn’t pull a Moxen

out of harm's way. But not long after their first mission together, Talfus had made a decision. If Malo were ever injured in battle and couldn't escape, he would die fighting by the Moxen's side.

"Malo, my friend," Talfus said, smiling, "you have enough heart to move mountains."

The Zebulon's engines revved higher, and Talfus turned, raising his gun as the ship hovered to the ground. It jostled to a stop, the growl of its motors fading beneath the wind. A door alongside the cockpit swung open, and Talfus snugged the rifle to his shoulder again, peering down the sights at the dark portal.

"How we know if Mewlatai?" said Malo.

Talfus kept his eye trained on the doorway. "I think we'll know him by sight," he said. "I've heard you can't mistake them for any other race. That they have a certain . . ." Talfus paused. ". . . way about them." Talfus braced against the storm, clicking off the seconds in his head as the wind stirred and the portal stayed dark. He stood firm, drawing air slowly into his belly then out again, praying the breath would starve his doubt before it blossomed to terror. A figure glided from the opening, and the air caught in Talfus's throat.

The creature landed some twenty feet below the portal, taking the ground as easy as stepping from a porch. He donned a dark cloak, its hood pulled low, hiding his eyes. The newcomer stalked forward, and fear crept through Talfus, crawling cold through his marrow on a million needle legs. A wary note drifted up behind him, and Talfus knew Malo felt the same. Every Durax and Berzerker they'd ever fought was a stone killer. But the dark stranger approaching them now was something different altogether. He didn't so much walk as prowl, shoulders dipped, head low and still as he strode smoothly across the uneven ground. The stranger moved like something on the hunt, and Talfus couldn't be sure it wasn't so. Talfus tightened his trigger finger as the cloaked figure padded closer.



“I’m not armed, master Waadi,” growled the stranger. “You mind lowering that rifle?”

His words made a question, but his tone bristled with threat. The stranger’s voice, mixed with his fearless gait, only added to Talfus’s doubts as Malo stepped beside him, hooves set wide, fists flexing on his hammer.

“Again, I’m unarmed. Your commanders invited me here. Please lower your weapon.”

This time the petition was softer, and hope flickered inside Talfus. *Maybe this is the Mewlatai you’ve been waiting for after all.* “I’ll do as you ask,” said Talfus, rifle still clutched at the ready, “if you’ll do something for me first.”

“And what’s that, master Waadi?”

“Confirm the codes for this Serum drop,” Talfus said. “And show yourself.” The Waadi was no coward. He had the scars, the commendations, and his new appointment as captain to prove it. But his last words quivered on his tongue, tripping over a knot of fear he tried hard to untangle.

The stranger slowed to a stop. He stood still for a moment, then a chuckle ground from his throat. “Of course,” he said. “I’m afraid smuggling the Serum has affected my manners. In my business, it pays to keep out of sight. The code for this drop is X-Alpha-6-8-7-Carduss-Octum.” He paused and tilted his head to the side. “How’d I do?”

“That’s the right code,” said Talfus. “Now the cloak, if you please.”

“Sure,” the stranger said.

He straightened his neck and smirked, razor teeth shining white in the shadow of his hood. He held out his arms, and his cloak shed from his body, vanishing behind him as Talfus gasped and Malo snorted. The Waadi glanced at his partner, wondering if his own eyes were as wide as

the Moxen's. If so, they might fall out of his head any second. Either way, he knew they were thinking the same thing. *Do the Mewlatai have mind powers?*

"Hmph," grunted the newcomer. "You flatter me. But my people don't have that gift."

Talfus cocked his head, the small fins on either side of his neck going stiff as he lowered his gun. "I find that hard to believe," he said. "We didn't say a word between us, but you seem to know our thoughts."

"I don't need mind powers for that," the stranger said. "A mewling could read your faces."

Talfus flushed, shame burning his already-hot skin. "I'm sorry," he said. "It's just nobody in the Dissension has seen your kind in years." But Talfus was getting an eyeful now. The stranger stood as tall as he did, but all likeness stopped there. Where Talfus was long limbed and slender, covered in blue scales, the Mewlatai was thick and muscled, shrouded in black fur. He wore a black sleeveless jacket, one half of its front tucked beneath the other, cutting a sharp V at the top that showed his chest. A pair of matching trousers clung to his waist, pleated folds hanging loose around his legs. Everything about him was dark, save for two things. A patch of orange fur flared on his breast, a mound of purple scar cutting it in two, and his eyes shone amber, glowing just this side of firelight.

"I understand," said the mew. "My people abandoned you long ago."

Talfus fought his urge to nod. "I hope you don't mind me asking. But if you can't move things with your mind, how'd you do that?" He nodded after the vanishing robe. *Please don't say magic. The last person I want to face down is a damn sorcerer.* The stranger smirked, mischief curling his mouth once more, and Talfus shifted nervously on his feet.

"As you wish," the Mewlatai said.

He didn't move, and Talfus looked at Malo, the Moxen answering the glance with a wrinkled snout. Talfus counted to himself again as the seconds scraped by. And then the cloak hovered over the Mewlatai's shoulder. At first, Talfus thought the stranger was screwing with them, that he'd lied about not having some kind of telekinesis, or at the very least, failed to mention he had magic. But then a flash of lightning unveiled his secret. A fifth appendage curled from his back, coiled around the cloth. Apparently, Mewlatai tails were good for more than just balance.

"You can call me Blangaris," he said. He unclenched the cloak, and it fell to the ground behind him. He leaned to the side, looking past Talfus, then folded his arms. "I thought your Doctor Blink might be here. Seeing how the effects of the Serum are biological."

"How you know Blink?" Malo said, glancing sidelong at the Mewlatai.

"Let's not gorulshit each other," said Blangaris. "Artemus Blink was famous before the Ellerium System fell to the Durax. The leading interspecies biologist and engineer of our time. Everyone knows he joined the Dissension after escaping his homeworld. He's never said his name, but I know it's him I've been talking to in our coded transmissions. Now where is he?"

"Indisposed, I'm afraid," Talfus said.

"Ah. Does this have anything to do with the soldiers watching us?" Blangaris slipped his hands from under his arms and pointed to either side.

"How—how did you—" Talfus stuttered. He hoisted his rifle to his shoulder, and Malo snorted, inching back his hammer.

"Easy," said Blangaris, patting the air. "I can see them."

"Impossible," Talfus spat. "They can't see this plateau except through their rifle scopes."

Blangaris scoffed, folding his arms again. "I imagine if we were underwater, you'd be able to see, what? Five, maybe ten times farther than me?"

"Closer to ten," Talfus said, Waadi pride straightening his back.

"Then I hope you can see there's nothing sinister at work here. Under the waves you'd have an edge. But above water the advantage is mine. It's just biology, master Waadi. Which is what we were talking about, wasn't it?"

"No, we weren't talking biology," said Talfus. "You were asking after Doctor Blink."

Blangaris made a sour face. "I get it. After years of supplying the Dissension with the Serum, you still don't trust me. And Artemus Blink would be a terrible asset to lose, say if he was killed. Or abducted, even."

Talfus nodded. "Correct on every account. And how can you expect us to trust you, hmm? You've never insisted on a face-to-face before. All of our Serum drops to date have been done through runners. And you weren't exactly forthcoming when you demanded this meeting. How do you know the old Serum formula is failing?"

"A fair question, I suppose," Blangaris said. "I was on Bardeene, one of the last free spaceports in the Xenol System, delivering an order of Serum to some customers. Sadly, a Durax flotilla arrived shortly after we finished our transaction. The crew who'd taken the Serum and I were caught in the open by two Overlords. Every one of them fell to the floor, screaming from a mind-spike, and I was left to dispatch the Durax on my own. Is that proof enough?"

Talfus swallowed hard, the knot of fear that had been on his tongue sliding down, twining in his throat. "You killed *two* Durax Overlords? In their Irongore?"

"Do you know anything below a General to fight without one?"

Talfus shook his head slowly. His wonder faded and he scowled. “So you’re selling the Serum to people who aren’t Dissension?”

“Look,” said Blangaris, pinching the ridge of snout between his eyes as he clenched them shut. “Making the Serum isn’t cheap. Ingredients, synthesis machines, storage canisters.” He flicked out a finger for each item on his list. “Not to mention transportation to spaceports where runners can pick it up. It all costs money. Now, I’ve been kind enough not to charge the Dissension. But if my services aren’t appreciated, you and your friends can fight your war without the Serum.”

Blangaris turned for his ship, and desperation mixed with the fear inside Talfus. *The Serum is the only thing that can even the odds against the Durax, and you know it. If the Mewlatai boards his ship and disappears, all hope goes with him!* “Please don’t go,” the Waadi said. Blangaris stopped and then turned, locking eyes with Talfus. “I didn’t mean to sound ungrateful. But why did you call for this meeting? Why not just use runners to deliver this new batch of Serum like all the rest?”

“Because of the Red Wards,” Blangaris growled, a snarl twitching his lip.

“What is Red Ward?” said Malo.

“The Mewlatai’s greatest killers. Sworn to uphold Raijen Law and protect the sacred Blood Scroll. And once they’ve taken up the hunt, they won’t stop until they cut the head off their prey.” Blangaris drew a dark claw across his neck.

“Hunted by own kind?” Malo said, a sad look pulling his face long.

Blangaris nodded. “Queen Cleondra forbid our people from the Duraxian War. By helping the Dissension, I’ve broken royal decree. The Red Wards found me and I fled. But not before I saw them destroy my laboratory.” The Mewlatai hung his head. “I’m here, master Waadi,

because I'm on the run, and the canisters on my ship are all that's left of the Serum. I wanted to be sure it reached the Dissension, just in case I'm not as lucky the next time the Red Wards find me."

Talfus's mouth went as dry as his skin, and he realized it was hanging open. He clamped his lips, shook his head, and cursed. "But if you die, the Serum dies with you. And the Dissension not long after that. And then there'll be no one to fight the Durax. They'll rule the galaxy forever."

"No," Blangaris said. "They won't. I've memorized the new Serum formula, and I'll give it to you. But some of the ingredients are sourced from my homeworld, and I'm not sure if you'll be able to re-create them. *That's* why I wanted Blink to be here. So we could talk about a synthetic solution."

Talfus looked at Malo, and the Moxen nodded.

"Let me call our commander," Talfus said. "I'll tell him what you just told me. Then, hopefully, get clearance to bring you inside."

"No," the Mewlatai said. "I've lingered here too long as it is." He eyed the clouds left and right. "I need to keep moving. Let's test the Serum. Once you're satisfied with the results, I'll give you the canisters and the instructions on how to make it. And then I'll go."

"But if the Red Wards catch you?" Talfus said.

"Then I'll be dead." Blangaris reached inside his jacket, fetching out an injector along with two vials of green liquid. He loaded a tube into the device and gripped it around the handle, and Talfus frowned. "Now what is it, master Waadi?"

"How's it work?" Talfus said.

“Um,” said Blangaris, cocking a brow. “I give you the Serum, and the Durax can’t mind-spike you anymore.”

“That’s not what I meant,” Talfus said, trying to keep any bite from his voice. “They say the Mewlatai are the only race in the galaxy immune to Durax mind powers. Why is that?”

Blangaris shrugged. “We don’t know. And neither do the Durax. That’s why they’re afraid of us. They’re no match for a Mewlatai in battle. Not without their terrible gift. Hence their machines.”

Talfus shuddered. It was the second time the Durax contraptions had come up. But that didn’t matter. A thousand mentions would crawl his skin as many times over. “But there must be something of your kind in the Serum, right?”

“It’s fortified with our blood.” Blangaris frowned. “Well, my blood, at least. And there’s a sample of that with the shipment too.” He held up the injector and wiggled it. “Now, I take it you’ve never had the Serum.”

“Never,” Talfus said. “As you know, it’s always in short supply.”

Blangaris smirked again. “Only so much blood I can give before it makes me weak.” He looked to Malo. “And what about you, master Moxen?”

“No Serum for Malo.”

“And you’ve both faced Durax on the field?”

“Slave Order and Soldiers, mostly,” said Talfus. “There’ve been some Generals and an Overlord once. But Malo and I are lucky enough to have never felt a mind-spike.”

Blangaris nodded, his hard stare tempered with a look of respect. “I’m sure luck has something to do with it,” he said. “But don’t sell yourselves short. Facing the Durax with a naked mind takes more courage than even I can fathom.” Talfus smiled at the compliment, his chest

swelling a touch, and Malo snorted his thanks. “Now, did your Doctor Blink give you something to test against?”

Talfus slid his rifle onto his back, letting it dangle on its sling, and reached into a satchel on his belt, pulling a holotab from inside. Two wires hung from the device, a suction disk attached to the end of each cable. Talfus pressed the pads to his skin, one near each of his temples, then swiped a finger across the computer. “Doctor Blink said a Serum with higher potency will show increased alpha waves in a scan.”

“Quite right,” Blangaris said, pressing the injector into the Waadi’s ribs on the left side.

“What’re you doing?” said Talfus.

“This’ll go faster if the Serum is injected near your heart.”

“You know Waadi bodies?” Talfus said, his jaw going loose again. “Are you some kind of doctor too?”

Blangaris grinned. “No, master Waadi. It’s the same as before. It’s *my* body. I can hear your heartbeat.” He closed his eyes and sniffed. “And smell the blood pumping through it. This will all be over soon.”

Talfus wasn’t sure if the Mewlatai meant the inoculation or the beating of his heart, and terror needled his spine again, cutting through to his gut. He lurched back, but Blangaris snatched him by the shoulder, jamming the injector into the Waadi’s torso and pulling the trigger. The device hissed, green liquid draining from the vial, and Talfus cried out, in part from the stabbing needle, but mostly from the fear of doubt.

“Easy,” Blangaris said. “You’ll feel uncomfortable at first. But it’ll pass.”

A sharp pain jabbed Talfus, like a dagger, and he clutched his chest. Malo swayed back and forth beside him, an uneasy song moaning from his lips.



Talfus wailed and staggered, his heart thrashing inside him. He squinched his eyes, pawing them with one hand, clutching the holotab in the other, trying to read the screen through a blur of color and tears. He sucked in a shuddering breath, and the pain vanished. Talfus found his footing, standing tall as warmth tingled his chest, pulsing further through his body with every heartbeat. He gulped another draught of air, steadying his nerves as he blinked his eyes clear, certain the computer would confirm his new defenses against Durax mind powers.

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Talfus stood strong again, and Malo stepped toward his friend.

“His troubles are almost over,” Blangaris said, sliding between them, loading another vial into the Serum injector. “Your time has come, master Moxen.”

The Mewlatai closed in and Malo stiffened, a foul stink burning his nose. It reeked like rotted meat and sweat—a funk the Moxen could never forget. It had choked the air of his homeworld as its fields burned and his kin screamed. It was the scent of the Durax.

Malo roared, hauling his hammer overhead. He swung down and Blangaris slid aside as the bludgeon crashed the stone. The Moxen spun left, pulling his weapon along behind him, howling another battle cry. But the Mewlatai dodged the blow again, followed by the next, and the three after that. Blangaris flashed through his sight, slipping left and right as Malo snarled and swung. Then he vanished altogether. A shadow fluttered at the corner of his eye, and the Moxen sent his hammer to crush it.

He whirled a half circle, catching sight of Blangaris as he turned. The Mewlatai lunged forward, snapping his forearm into Malo’s elbow with a crunch. The Moxen screamed, arm hinging the wrong way on its joint as the hammer flew from his grip. Blangaris snatched Malo by a horn, kicked his left knee, and pulled him to the ground, pouncing on his back.

Malo was a fearsome warrior, but Blangaris had the strength of ten Moxen soldiers. And even if he somehow found a way to overpower his enemy, the fight inside Malo had withered, cut from his chest along with his heart. Talfus lay a few feet off, the gills on his neck unmoving like the rest of him. Blood seeped from his eyes and mouth, staining the rock beneath his corpse, and Malo reached over with his good arm, straining to touch his friend's outstretched fingers. "Trusted you, Mewlatai," he cried. "Talfus trusted. So did Malo. You killed fish man. Why did you kill fish man?"

"I'll tell you," spat Blangaris. "The enemy of my enemy is my friend, master Moxen. And the Dissension has allied itself with the wrong mew." A growl rumbled deep in his chest. "I'm going to destroy the Serum. I'll find its maker and tear out his fucking heart. Then eat it while he dies watching. And then I'll burn him to ash, down to the last hair on his body. I'll slaughter the eldest son of House Daelekon, master Moxen, and anyone who stands with him!"

Malo caught sight of Talfus's rifle on the ground and he snorted, anger, hurt, and confusion twisting his insides as he lay pinned to the cold stone. He had no idea who the eldest son of House Daelekon was, or why Blangaris hated him enough to murder. All Malo knew was his friend was dead, and the Dissension lookouts hadn't done a thing. If they couldn't see the ambush coming, surely by now they could see the Mewlatai was no friend. Talfus had said they were watching through their rifle scopes. "Why not shoot?" he sobbed. "Why leave Talfus and Malo to die? Why kill fish man? Killed fish man. Malo kill you, Mewlatai. Kill you!"

Blangaris laughed. "I believe you'd try," he said. "And I might be afraid. But I know something about vengeance you don't. It favors the mighty." He slammed his arm into the side of Malo's neck, and the Moxen fell into darkness.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sean Allen is the author of the D-Evolution series of space opera fantasy novels. His online base of operations is [www.authorseanallen.com](http://www.authorseanallen.com). You can connect with Sean on Twitter at [@AuthorSeanAllen](https://twitter.com/AuthorSeanAllen) and on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/authorseanallen](https://www.facebook.com/authorseanallen).

**DECEIT**  
**The D-Evolution: Book One**

by  
Sean Allen

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